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ABSTRACT

In 1982 the University of West Florida (UWF) transferred control of one of its off-campus center locations to a sister institution. The loss of the center reduced UWF College of Education enrollment by 194 students. A two-year effort in developing the graduate school at the site resulted in an increase of 185 students enrolled in graduate-level classes. The program developed required close collaboration between the University and the local school district superintendents and their staffs. The major components of the new program were: (1) all classes would be delivered "on site" in the district rather than on the main campus; (2) the programs would run in cycles having a definite beginning and ending date, thus ensuring that the program would run to completion; (3) an advisor would be assigned to each student providing a direct link to the University; (4) an accelerated schedule would be developed to accommodate students, the majority being public school teachers and administrators who work during the day; and (5) three broad areas would be offered, providing masters degrees in elementary education, curriculum and instruction, and educational leadership. A discussion is presented on the difficulties faced and solved in the implementation of such a program. (JD)

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The Three Mile Chasm: An Account of How A College of Education Dramatically Increased Its Graduate Enrollment

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Running head: THE THREE-MILE CHASM

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The Three-Mile Chasm

An Account of How A College of Education Dramatically Increased Its Graduate Enrollment

The University of West Florida was originally an upper-level university located in the attractive and extreme western portion of the Panhandle of Florida. In the summer of 1983, the state legislature approved the addition of a lower division. A limited number (75 to 100) of freshmen were admitted, bringing the total attendance to approximately 6,000. Although the state has experienced a tremendous growth in population, the growth in the Panhandle area has been modest by comparison (see Table 1).

Insert Table 1 about here.

Despite this modest increase in population, there has been a decline in the school-age student population in the four counties closest to the university (see Table 2).

Insert Table 2 about here

In 1982, the university transferred control of one of its off-campus center locations to a sister institution. The center, approximately 107 miles distance to the east, had been part of the university for

over 10 years. The loss of the center severely affected enrollment in the College of Education, for of the three colleges in the university, this college has the greatest proportion of its enrollment. Overnight, UWF College of Education enrollment was reduced by 194 students.

In spite of these conditions, the College of Education within a 2-year period has managed to attract 195 new students into its graduate-level classes. Enrollment is now greater than in the era that included the off-campus center. Describing and interpreting the conditions that allowed this accelerated growth will be the purpose of this paper.

First and foremost, appropriate university-school district protocol was utilized in developing the new enrollment. There is an abundance of literature in political science dealing with protocol; however, very little of this appears in educational journals. Before any recruiting of potential graduate candidates was conducted, UWF personnel met with the local superintendents and their staffs. At this meeting the purposes and objectives of the new programs were detailed, and an effort was made to gain district-level administrative support.

The program presented to the superintendent and their staffs included the following components:

1. On Site

   All classes would be delivered "on site" in the district rather than on the main campus. This would hold, regardless of whether or not the university had a center at the desired

location. Registration and other administrative details would be handled "on site" as well.

2. Planned Comprehensive Programs

The programs would run in cycles having a definite beginning and ending date. Thus, participants would have the assurance that the program would run to completion. The sequence of courses would be presented early to potential participants. Frequently, off-campus offerings in the area had included a class offered here and there with no definite pattern. The planned sequences, however, would provide a reliable pattern.

3. Faculty-Student Linkage

Each participant would be assigned an advisor. This person would serve as the main link between the student and the university. Too often in off-campus offerings, classes had been offered but the student has no assigned advisor or one that resided on the main campus. An assigned advisor in the field would establish a communication network that is simple but effective.

4. Accelerated Schedule

An accelerated schedule would be developed to accommodate the prospective students. A majority of College of Education graduate students are public school teachers and administrators who work during the day. The Florida public universities operate on a semester basis. Thus, a

three-semester class in the evening will run approximately for 2½ hours for 16 weeks. At this rate, obtaining a master's degree is a long, laborious process. The programs were designed so that the classes would meet from 3:30 to 8:30 one night per week for 8 weeks. Therefore, with only one evening away from their families, the students would be able to take two classes within the usual semester. Arrangements like this have been used elsewhere, to be sure, but not in such a preplanned, sequential format. Consequently, in addition to numbers accumulated, the next series of offerings would also be the required sequential courses in the particular program.

5. Relevance of the Degree

Three broad areas would be offered: a master's degree in elementary education, a master's degree in curriculum and instruction, and a master's in educational leadership. In some areas, the master's in curriculum and instruction had the greatest appeal, for this is a program directed at personnel who are not interested in seeking administrative positions at a later date. The curriculum and instruction program is designed to develop a master teacher, one who desires to remain in the classroom.

In initial discussions with districts, comments surfaced such as "We don't want anything to do with classes where the instructor comes

in and states 'What would you like to discuss today?'" or "We want classes with substance." The message was clear--what was desired was a meaningful program.

1. When recruitment began, a member of the local district administrative staff served on the team. This presented a unified effort as opposed to a program only the university had interest in.
2. The location and conditions of the recruitment activity did much to facilitate the success of the effort. The following elements were considered:

   The meeting was to occur in a centralized location convenient to the largest number of teachers off campus. Those of us who work on a university campus often don't realize how threatening or, at the least, anxiety-producing a visit to campus can become. Many businesses and occupations who share the same problem have taken steps to correct the situation.

   In addition to the normal anxiety of a visit to the unknown, an infrequent visitor to campus is faced with the following assortment of problems: Where do I park? How long can I park here? Where is building H? And so forth. Thus, for recruiting and delivery purposes, centrally located schools, within the school district, were selected. For some inexplicable reason, the switch

of venue from the university campus to local schools dramatically boosted attendance. Reasons offered were "there were no parking problems", "I've been here so many times for meetings it was just easy to come." In the elementary master's program, over 150 appeared with approximately 86 registering to begin the program. The irony is that the high school selected was only three miles from the main campus where classes, incidentally, had been cancelled because of a lack of enrollment. A colleague remarked, upon hearing of the attendance, "It is though there is a three-mile chasm existing that some of these people would fall into if they crossed a certain point." There is no doubt that bringing the programs off campus swelled enrollment, but the overall results were shocking.

At the same high school, the educational leadership program gained 51 new students. In Chipley, 117 miles east of The University of West Florida and where no center exists, over 60 students enrolled in the educational leadership master's programs. The enrollment data for DeFuniak Springs, seventy six miles West of campus, has remained constant, for that program is a continuation of a 6-year effort in the county.

In mounting an off-campus posture, there are many questions that should be asked:

1. How will the shift to an off-campus thrust affect on campus offerings? The answer to this question is rather easy to resolve--simply look at the past growth pattern of on-campus graduate offerings--has it risen or fallen?
2. How does one deal with faculty members who resist moving the program to an off-campus location? The most effective persuasion is the data gathered above. It is obvious that undergraduate enrollment has declined, and it is simply a matter of time until the graduate schools feel the effect. This decrease in enrollment is attributable not only to declining birth rate, but also to the fact that fewer students are selecting higher education as a future direction.
3. How will library and support resources be collected and delivered? In Florida there is a public extension library operated by the state university system. This organization is most responsive to meeting the needs of off-campus personnel for texts and supporting materials .
4. How will time spent in travel be calculated when determining teaching load? For example if a faculty member has to drive 4 hours roundtrip, in addition to teaching the class, how will travel time be calculated when determining teaching load?
5. How does one coordinate audio visual needs? Currently the

faculty member checks the equipment out from the main campus and transports it himself/herself or makes arrangements for the host district to provide the needed equipment. Currently the majority of classes taught off campus are taught on an overload, extra pay basis.

Thus, in a period of declining college age population growth, enrollments in colleges and universities can be increased. This increase, however, will not come without effort and a specific plan of action. The advantage of the model presented is not only the various components presented but also their relationship one to another.

One cannot state that if the model is used then enrollments will automatically increase. However it would be safe to say that without the use of a model such as this the chances of increased enrollments are slim.

Table 1

Total Population

School District	4/1/70	4/1/80	Percent Increase
Escambia	205,334	233,794	13.86%
Santa Rosa	37,741	55,988	48.35%
Okaloosa	88,187	109.920	24.64%
Walton	16,087	21,300	32%

Note. Source: Profiles of Florida School Districts. Tallahassee, FL: Florida Department of Education, 1981

Table 2

Enrollment K-12

Selected School District

School District	1969-70	1979	1980
Escambia	49,985	42,382	42,024
Santa Rosa	10,351	12,313	12,136
Okaloosa	29,883	24,776	23,886
Walton	4,384	3,722	3,709

Note. Source: Profiles of Florida School Districts. Tallahassee, FL: Florida Department of Education, 1981